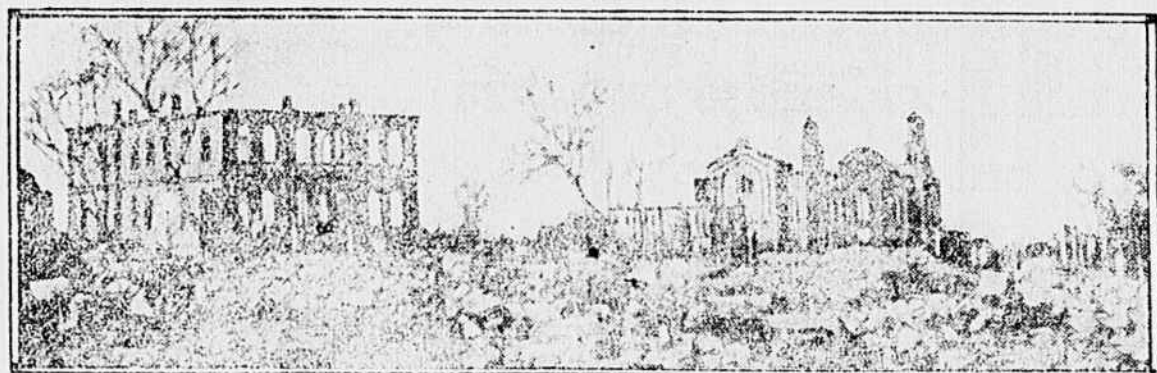


W of the Massacres of Christians in Turkey

This Catholic Priest, After His Own Church and Flock Had Been Destroyed and One of His Eyes Cut Out, Journeys Nine Months Across Turkey in Disguise and Writes of the Daily Scenes of Wholesale Murder—and Worse



Ruins of the Armenian Section of Damascus

four hundred miles to the south. He had already travelled more than a thousand miles from Damascus in Syria.

He gave me a letter of recommendation to another Greek priest and told me to continue travelling as a Persian pilgrim. His letter of recommendation was addressed to an influential Greek priest at Abukamal on the Euphrates River, about 650 miles to the northwest.

However, from Korna I went to Basra, then on a native river boat, and along with seventeen Arab pilgrims I started for the north on my way to Damascus. Finally, on the 17th day of April I arrived at the Arab town of El Mashukha on the River Tigris. I felt weary and discouraged. Every day I was becoming weaker and weaker. And still I had many thousands of miles to traverse ahead of me. I decided to remain at El Mashukha for a few days. My wounds were bothering me and my right eye was getting weaker in consequence of the loss of the left one.

I visited a native physician and after several treatments and a good wash I again started on my journey to Damascus which I reached ten days later.

During my long journey through the wild Arabian cities and towns I had noticed very little signs of violence, but no sooner had I reached this great Arab metropolis of Syria than I suddenly came to the full realization that I was again travelling in the hands where the Turk ruled supreme. Only a few days before my arrival in that town they had "attended" to the Christian population of the city. I went to the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Damascus with my letter of recommendation and was received with the Christian courtesy due to a Christian prelate. He told me that so far Greeks have been spared with studied discrimination. He also informed me that in the Syrian districts the Roman Catholics have been spared to a certain extent, but further north the Roman Catholics are identified with the Armenians, and that the Turkish officials were not discriminating between the Gregorian and Roman Catholic Armenians.

The Priest's Journey to Damascus

For this reason he advised me to don the garb of a Greek priest and accept a certificate from him, addressed to all the Greek Orthodox prelates in Turkey. I gratefully accepted his kind offer. This Greek Bishop also advised me not to go to Beirut, for it was impossible to obtain passage to the outside world as no steamers were touching that port. In company with a Greek medical officer I visited many Christian houses, or what was left of them, in Damascus. Every family had a gruesome tale to tell. At the eastern outskirts of this ancient city we visited many homes. At one place the man of the house, whom I took for the husband of the family, had a dirty cloth tied around his head across his eyes. I spoke Arabic.

The poor Chaldean and his three children prostrated themselves on the mud floor and were crying for mercy in the most heart-rending strain. I still wore my old Persian garb in which I had been travelling, and they took my friend in the Turkish uniform as a Turkish officer. The children could not distinguish us from the Turks; and the poor unfortunate Chaldean father was blind. The Turks had dug his eyes out of their sockets. I untied the dirty cloth that was hiding his eyes, and one look was enough; I could not look at them again. I tied the old cloth around his head and hid his repulsive-looking eye sockets.

Finally I succeeded in convincing them that I was their friend. I extended my hands to one of the little boys, who appeared to be the youngest, and was about seven years old. The young fellow stared at me without responding. I reached with both my hands to take hold of the young boy's hands, and felt dumfounded when I grasped two empty sleeves. He had no arms; the infuriated Bedouin soldiers had cut off both his arms for not telling them where the family kept its food. The poor little boy could not tell them where they could find food; they themselves were starving.

Another who was about ten years of age had his left leg cut off clean to the hip.

The third boy was lying under an old carpet. I had not the courage to go near him. I turned to the armless boy and asked him where his mother was. He shook his head.

For some time we walked through the mud-covered streets in silence. Like people walking in their dream we walked through the deserted streets of that once happy section where our Christian forefathers had found the Christian light for us—in this old Bible city of Damascus. As we walked through the streets that were lined with low one-story houses we noticed that the fanatical Turkish soldiery had left their handiwork in the suburbs.

Through the broken windows timid heads would bob out, then we would hear excited and hushed conversations of the horrified people within these houses. The district was filled with the offending decayed flesh—human flesh. Everywhere on the street corners we saw mutilated bodies. Sometimes they were thrown in piles of six or seven. There were evidences of their having been thrown on top of each other while they were still alive. I started to pray, but my officer companion held up his hand as though he wished to give command. He looked beside himself. "Do not pray," he commanded, "Curse, curse with all your might; then perhaps He will listen to you fools."

With the assistance of the Greek Bishop of Damascus I obtained a half rate passage on board the Damascus-Aleppo train. This line, running from Damascus to Aleppo, is about 120 miles in length, and has branch lines to Beirut and Tarsus. But it took us five days to cover this distance with wood-burning engines.

Finally we reached Aleppo. Aleppo had also been visited by the pillaging Moslem hordes. In Aleppo there is a large Roman Catholic community, but a very few of them were spared; and these were compelled to become Moslems for fear of their lives. Now I was wearing the garb of a Greek priest.

One Turkish officer estimated the Christian losses as between 40,000 and 50,000, and when I showed surprise he told me that this number included only those who were killed in that vicinity alone. He told me that more than 250,000 Christians were exiled from the province of Aleppo alone. "Do you think they will get anywhere before they have perished?" This is the question that is asked by every one.

While I was in Aleppo the Christian exiles from the west were coming at the rate of at least 5,000 per day, on their way to Mosul—on their way to sure death. For a few moments I watched their advance guard, but could not stand the tragic scene. It was a death parade. Multitudes were being coolly marched into sure death. As the ill-fated Christian exiles were being marched through the middle of the street I saw many Moslems pull away entire families from the marchers

and hasten them to their homes, where they secreted them from the officials.

I saw one middle-aged mother offer her two-year-old child to a Moslem woman who was watching the sad procession with tears in her eyes. This woman appeared to be of the middle class Moslems, who had disregarded the face coverings. The Armenian mother threw her child to the arms of the Moslem woman, saying, "Take it; in the name of God save it from my fate!"

This batch was coming from Antakia (Antioch), where the Christian Apostles first called themselves "Christians." The very cradle of Christianity was being desecrated in this twentieth century!

From Aleppo I travelled to Kiliz. I found the entire Christian population of Kiliz exterminated; even the few Greek Orthodox Arabs and Roman Catholics were put to the sword. Not one Armenian was left.

On the 24th day of June I was about to enter the town of Yarsughat when a group of irregulars, led by a uniformed officer, stopped me and demanded of me to give up my two donkeys; they were needed by the military. "I will give you everything willingly so long as you do not ask for my life," I said jokingly, in the meantime offering the brides of my two donkeys to the Turkish officer.

Thereupon one of the irregulars said to me: "Walk, you infidel, walk!"

On the 29th day of June I approached the gate of the great stone bridge that joins the Oth Ghetcheh with the city of Adana proper, over the River Sihon. On that side of the bridge there are many Moslem shops. As I heard the bridgehead several Moslem shopkeepers shouted at me insulting remarks. I neither looked to the right nor to the left, but proceeded toward the sentry who was on guard duty at the gate.

I offered him my travelling papers, which he approved. The Greek Metropolitan was not in the city, but another official in charge of the Greek parochial school took me in charge. Later two Greeks visited the church paragonage where I was conversing with three other priests, and each demanded that I be allowed to accept their hospitality.

But behind this kindly treatment what gruesome scenes were awaiting me! The 25,000 or 30,000 Armenian population of Adana had disappeared! Where were they? No one knew, no one wished to know. People would not talk about it. They simply said to me, "You will see to-morrow with your own eyes."

That very night my Greek host sent for a young Moslem surgeon to operate on my already blind left eye. Until midnight we sat around the mangial (portable fire-place) and I listened to the indescribable outrages enacted in that city which only a few years before had been submitted to fire and sword. The Greeks had up to that time been spared from wholesale murder and outrages, but no one knew when the order to finish up the Greek Christians would be received. The Greek population of Asia Minor were trembling with the fear that the Hellenic Government would declare war against the Turks; then the end would come.

I am not going to relate to you what other people told me; I am not going to describe to you what other people proved to me; neither am I going to speak of the undeniable and unimpeachable evidences that confronted me, proving that between 600,000 and 800,000 Christians of Turkey—Armenian Gregorians, Roman Catholics and Protestants—have been killed since the beginning of the war. I will, here in Adana, relate to you what I actually saw with my own eye.

That night I asked my host if there were Roman Catholic churches in the city of Adana. They told me that there were. I did not wish to tell my host, who was Greek Orthodox, that in truth I was a Roman Catholic priest. But I told them that I had long years of communion with the Maronite Roman Catholic Church, and that I wished to visit their place of worship if possible. To this they said that the district where the Maronite Church was had been pillaged, so they did not think that their little church was spared.

The following day a young Greek military officer, who was serving in the service of the Turks as a captain and who was stationed in Adana, came to visit my host. I will not mention his name, for he is still serving with the Ottoman army of the south. He said to me:

Pitiful Scenes in Ancient Adana

"Holy Father, come with me. I wish to take you to the Chaldean Church. I wish you to see what happened to Adana. This is a very small sample of what is going on throughout the entire empire. When you go to Greece, for God's sake tell everyone, shout it from the housetops and warn them as to what is awaiting us Greeks also."

The poor young officer did not know that I had already seen so many tragic sights that it had become quite difficult for me to be further affected. He did not know that I had with my own eyes seen thousands murdered and outraged, and that I had already smelled the burning human flesh of my own beloved flock. Nevertheless, I accepted his invitation. He took me to the old Chaldean Church, which is on the east side of the old Armenian grave yard, and at the very edge of what was once an Armenian district.

The Chaldean Catholic Church is a dilapidated building, built of sun-burnt mud-bricks; to be more accurate, it is not a building. It looks more like a way-side inn that travellers would encounter on the highways of Asia-Minor. Over the entrance there is a huge wooden cross, and a few feet from the wooden cross, suspended from a wooden staging, is a steel blade, one foot wide, four feet long, and about half an inch thick. A white-bearded patriarchal looking old man in black robe, wearing a triangular shaped green cap, had, a few weeks before, for the last time beaten at the steel blade with a pair of sledge hammers, with all his might to call the congregation. This was the bell of the Chaldean Catholic Church.

But visit with me that humble church and see what crimes were committed within its four walls!

As we approached the church gate the patriarchal old man who had beaten at the steel blade since his childhood, appeared at the door.

I addressed him in Perso-Chaldaic, and asked him to take me to the priest of the church. The Greek officer who was acting as my escort had constantly refused to tell me anything about the place, always saying, "See it with your own eyes and hear it with your own ears."

The old man's smiling countenance became grief-stricken. He said, "Our holy father has joined his Saviour."

"Come," he motioned, and I followed him into the interior of the church. The inner door was smashed. But I

could not proceed any longer; the smell of the decayed flesh was unbearable.

"How many people were killed in there?" I asked.

"Perhaps five hundred," he answered rather coolly.

With the light of a small wax candle I hastily scanned the interior of the church. One look was enough. The windowless church, made of baked mud with its mud arches and ceilings could not burn. But the interior furnishings had been set on fire after the terrorized congregation had taken refuge in their house of worship upon the outbreak of the massacre, thinking that the Moslems would respect their church.

Every one of those who had taken refuge in that church had been either burnt to death or suffocated.

"Why don't you remove the bodies and bury them?" I asked.

"They could not get a permit from the government!" I was amazed to hear from the lips of a priest these words, as he pointed to the festering mass of some five hundred bodies inside the church.

"The dead bodies of our martyred brethren will sooner or later wreak vengeance upon their murderers!"

He meant that with the coming of the hot months the decaying corpses of the Chaldean Christians would breed disease and plague would carry away their murderers who are now alive.

Christian Exiles on the March

I hurried into the street, for I could not bear the sight.

The old man clung to my sleeve and begged me to remain until what is left of the Chaldean Catholic congregation gathered in the churchyard.

"It is meal time. The few remainders of our congregation will soon arrive. Whenever they hear the bell ringing they come to the court yard. I have just beaten on the blade," he said with tears in his eyes.

They were all old men and women; children of both sexes, but there were no young women among them and only a few men. The majority of the Chaldean community had tasted the cruel blade of the heartless Moslems. There were about 4,000 Chaldean Catholics in that city, and now no more than 150 are left! I started to ask the old guardian of the church where their women folk were; but I knew the answer.

I have only related facts pertaining to the Catholic Chaldean community. Their condition was terrible. But yet they had not suffered as much as the Armenian community. I made several attempts to obtain passage on board the Adana-Konia-Afium Kara Hissar-Stamboul line, but was told that passage to civilians on this line was forbidden. The other route was to Ankara over araba roads and from Ankara to Stamboul on a slow train to the capital. But finally after a personal appeal to the Vali of Adana by two high ranking Greek military officers, I was enabled to receive travelling papers authorizing me to journey on the A. K. A. Stamboul line.

The train rolled along leisurely all day, stopping, on an average, once every half hour or so, at bright, fresh little station houses all cast in the same mould with always a terrified crowd of exile Armenians being loaded into the roofless wooden railroad cars under the burning tropical sun. After a while little wayside stations disappeared, and for some time I thought along with them also disappeared the terrible station scenes of the exiles.

But soon we began to see in the far distance the rough and narrow araba roads lined with humanity, all headed eastward in their weary pilgrimage. They were facing the east, the death-dealing east, where hunger, privation and sure death awaited them. Occasionally I heard when the wind blew soft and in our direction, the weird, paeon-like hymns that the Christian exiles were singing as they marched.

They were singing: "If it is Thy will, O Father, we come, we come, willingly we come to Thee." To the rest of the passengers these paeans meant nothing, but to me it was heart-piercing. Something gathered in my throat. I closed the car window. I could not bear it; it pierced my ears and burned my heart and I felt as though some one had his fingers clutched around my neck.

One of my fellow passengers who was a Moslem said to me sympathetically, "I see you are affected. What are they singing?" I told him the words and explained what they meant to a Christian. The old Moslem removed a large blue handkerchief from his belt pocket, and after drying his eyes said: "Such faith! Such faith! Allah is great and he will hear them!"

On the third day of our train journey we arrived at Afium Karahissar. This city had formerly 45,000 souls of all races, about 25,000 of whom were Christians. To-day there are only one hundred and twenty houses standing. This was the only place where the Christians took up arms and resisted the military order to vacate their homes.

"If we must die we will make you pay for it dearly." They sent this answer to the Turkish military authorities and simultaneously barricaded themselves in the heart of the city. After several days of pitched battle between the Turks and the besieged Armenians, between the two contestants they burned down the city.

Near Kutahya one of my Moslem fellow passengers called my attention to a long ravine which ran along the railroad tracks for several thousand feet. These deep ravines were full of human bodies. I asked my Moslem fellow passenger how could they have been brought there? It appears that the night before they were dumped

there from a train. In that ravine there were no less than 2,000 bodies. "In mid-Summer these ravines turn into fast-running streams, emptying themselves into the main river," said one of the Moslem passengers.

Slowly the train crept along, with many delays. Finally we were ejected from the cars at Izmid, because the train was requisitioned for the soldiers. Eventually I became convinced that even if I had paid for my passage to Stamboul I could not travel by rail; neither would they refund one para. I had to tie my baggage on my back and start on foot to Stamboul, a journey of seventy-five miles.

That night I slept in the yard of the Greek Orthodox Church in Izmid, and the next morning arose long before the sun in order to travel a few miles in the early cool morning. After the first day's travel on foot I caught up to an araba caravan, and for one pound I engaged passage to Stamboul. An araba does not run, it moves, and it moves at the rate of two or three miles per hour. At this speed it took us a little over three days to travel the rest of the distance to the capital. In the caravan there were about one hundred and fifty arabas. They were all loaded with food and other materials for the army at Stamboul.

The regular vehicle roads were practically congested. Tens of thousands of returning wounded soldiers travelling eastward; thousands of slow-moving arabas moving westward in a slow but constant stream; fresh recruits by the thousands marching toward the capital on foot. These and many other military necessities had already taxed the capacity of all roads—rail and foot—so that there was no room left for the Christian exiles on these highways. So they were marching over trackless lands, and more or less following the regular highways.

Tens of thousands of these weary pilgrims had strayed from the highways and settled, some in the wilderness, others along the great river banks, and still others had pitched tents on high mountain crests. There were even those who had mounted mountain plateaus and had defied the military to dislodge them. The Stamboul authorities, thereupon, finding out that they could not spare enough regular soldiers to cope with this situation, opened the gates of all the prisons and let out the entire criminal population, numbering from 75,000 to 100,000 Moslem inmates.

They coolly organized these men into regular bands, and after arming them left the matter of the Armenian evacuation of Asia Minor in their hands.

These criminal bands stop the unarmed exiles at will, go through the group, select their women, take them some distance and the following day they are permitted to catch up with the main body of exiles. I have seen with my own eyes thousands of women—young women—with ugly cuts on their faces and with swollen cheeks that had decayed into whiteness. I have also learned that these people had themselves inflicted these wounds on themselves in order to render themselves repulsive.

I stayed in Stamboul until the 28th day of September, and then made my way to Athens, where I have now finished writing this brief report of my nine months' journey. I have been told that the extermination of the Christians was suggested to the Turks by the Germans as a military expedient—that it was unwise to leave unfriendly masses of people free in the Turkish dominion. I do not know. God alone knows who shall be held responsible for the scenes I have witnessed, but have so feebly described.



Christian Refugees in the Protection of Russian Troops